VERSES

By Isabella Howe Fiske

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VERSES

BY

ISABELLA HOWE FISKE, '96

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BY
ISABELLA HOWE FISKE

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Dedication.

TO KATHARINE LEE BATES.

To you the flowers whisper as you pass;
You comrade Nature. How, then, shall I dare
To offer one who gathers blossoms rare,
My little handful of the "smale gras?"

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PART I.

Child Verses.

Alma Mater, just to-day,
May my children with yours play?

Recess.

WHEN the winds are out a-romping,
And the leaves play butterfly,
When 'tis after-school in Nature,
Let us wander, you and I,
Hand in hand, as children love to,
To the land men name the sky.

With the cloud-folk we can visit,
Of their chariot make our car,
Dressed in colors like the sunset;
And if we should stray so far
That the lights come out to call us,
Drop down on some shooting star.

The Nursery.

UPSTAIRS in the pine-boughs,
Where the cradles sway,
Little birds are sleeping,—
Mother bird's away;
Careful breezes rock them
Busily, all day.

Fairies and Brownies.

ONE fairy came to town
On a thistle-down;
Another on a sky-lark's song
Came dropping down;
And one a sunbeam slid along,—
That's how he got so brown!

House-Cleaning.

THE rain's a tidy parlor-maid;
She dusts with care each separate blade
And the high walls of the skies.
And Mother Nature, too, is wise
And often has a cleaning day
To wash the dust and dirt away.
On the carpets of the fields
Well her broom of storms she wields;
On her furniture of trees
The feather-duster of the breeze.
Then she's ready, when that's done,
For her company, the sun.

My Neighbor.

MY dear friend, Nature's lady,
Peeps through my window-pane,
And glancing in, she finds me there
Sending back her smiles again.

The world says she's a mountain;
It cannot understand.
I know, for I have talked with her,
That she's a lady grand.

She dresses with the climate,
And when the skies are blue,
Appears, in graceful partnership,
In the same celestial hue.

On smiling days she's with me;
But when the weather's gray,
She dons her mackintosh of mist
And vanishes away!

Clouds.

I.

THERE'S a little man in the clouds to-night,
And he looks down at me.
O little man in the sky so bright,
With you I long to be!

I hear him cry as he sails by
In the moonlight overhead,
Don't you wish that you were a cloud-man, too,
And needn't go to bed?

II.

In all the clouds the livelong day,
A hundred little goblins play,
And scamper straight across the sky;
I like to watch them scurry by.

They take all shapes the heart could wish,
Every kind of beast and fish.
With some of them I'd like to play,
But from the rest I'd run away!

III.

All the fleecy clouds one sees,
Mother says she does not know
Where they come from, where they go,
Moving in the sun and breeze,
In those blue fields far away;
But a fairy told me they
Are the souls of apple-trees
Just in blossom, white as snow;
And a fairy ought to know!

IV.

A great show-window is the sky,
Where the angels go to buy
All their plumed hats, white and gray,
And their robes that trail and sway
When they float amid the blue,
As the angels love to do!

Starlight.

I

WHEN Dusk presumes to follow
The footsteps of the Day,
He sets the blades a-shiver
Where late her warm tread lay.

The flowers forget to blossom,
The breezes hush their play,
A star peeps round the corner
And wishes him away.

II

All the little children dear
In this planet, far and near,
Must put their playthings out of sight,
And go to bed, when it is night.

But little children in the sky
Like to have the night come by,
For they can then go out and play,
Just as we children do by day.

You don't believe that it is true?
Then you must watch them as I do.
Every night I see them play
All along the Milky Way.

Dream-Time.

EVERY night-time, just at ten,
When the lamp is burning low,
My mamma comes up to bed.
I like to lie and watch her then,
For 'tis such fun to wake again,—
Although my prayers have long been said,—
Just for company, you know.

Her arms look very white and fair
By the lamp before the glass,
And she moves them to and fro
As she stands and braids her hair.
All the shadows gather there
On the wall, and come and go,
And the sleepy minutes pass.

I wonder why, when she's so small,
Her shadow is so big and gray;
I see it when I shut my eyes;
It blunders over all the wall,
And does not look like her at all.
I wonder why she sometimes cries
Until I kiss the tears away.

The China Plate.

COULD I unlock the garden gate
Upon the old blue china plate
That is the best of all my toys,
I'd be the happiest of boys!

In all things there my eyes delight,—
The curly clouds are blue and white.
And on the grass the waving trees
Invite my footsteps where I please.

And up the path a lady goes—
Stopping meanwhile to pick a rose—
To the old mansion on the hill,
That shows within the water still.

Two boys sit on the bank. I wish
That I could show them how to fish.
They do not seem to know the way,
And I've no one with whom to play.

Memory.

THE pillared house stands tall and straight,
And narrow paths within the gate
Lead where the noisy knocker calls
Its echoing summons through the halls.

About the flower-plots trim and square
I see a child run here and there,
Just peeping o'er the hedge of box,
And quite too short for hollyhocks.

Then to the brook and poplars tall,
The other side the garden-wall,
And all the wealth that pastures hold,
For such as delve in Nature's gold.

Till, wearied of the farmyard store,
Laughing he seeks the open door,
Where kindly faces watch and smile,
And many indoor hours beguile.

And as I look, I can but know
I am the child of long ago,
Whose memory still its way unlocks
Into the garden sweet with box.

Neighbors.

CHILDREN at play from houses near at hand;
The hours sped, laughter-winged, our childhood through;
Among the oft-trod haunts of wonderland
We watched the magic scenes that fancy drew,
Till future years were ours but to command.
And I was glad, for, though a child, I knew
It was a happy thing to neighbor you
The while our play a golden future planned.

I heard you sing to-day, and saw once more
Two girls at play, in old-time careless ways,—
Two children, pledging faith forever more.
And though your lot has brought you fame and praise,
And things yet brighter than our dreams of yore,
To dim the memory of those other days,
I know, though years and cities part our ways,
Our hearts are neighbors yet, as heretofore.

Change.

THE shadows of the past are there
In Mary's eyes,—
Blue, paling shadows on a slope of snow
Where sunshine lies
And takes soft sky-hues unaware.
The shadows of the future years
Shake into light through unsought tears.
Can youth and sweetness loveless go?
So love-light flashes
Through darkling lashes,
And the girl's are woman's eyes.

The years have wrought a deeper shade
In Mary's eyes;
The tread of time has left its trace
In sorrow's wise;
Yet is their watching unafraid,
For love and life together stray,
And strength takes still the laughter-way,
Pausing before a woman's face
Where faith still flashes
Through steadfast lashes,
And the girl's are the woman's eyes.

"The Kingdom of Heaven."

(A Painting by Charles Sims Royal Academy, 1899.)

A FLOOD of opal sunlight over flower and field and tree,
And the river flowing softly, as if to him were sweet
To hear the quick, soft footfall of unsteady little feet,
And the sound of children's voices, as they call aloud in glee.

Here colors glow that elsewhere can only fancy see,
And here the dreams of children they may as playmates greet.
Here are no joys forbidden, while hours move still and fleet,
And tears are all forgotten, as children's tears should be.

There shall be many mansions, yet one shall be most fair,
The play-ground of our children. Mayhap, if we be wise,
We shall leave the greater places to breathe its purer air,
For a golden afternooning of each daytime in the skies,
And become as little children, since only such are there,
Where laughter wields the sceptre, and childhood death defies.

PART II.

Nature-Verses and Songs.

Mother Nature, be it late
When from you I graduate!

Falling Leaves.

MAN that joys and man that grieves
Searches 'midst the falling leaves
Of the tree of thought.
And amongst such, drifting down,
For the bright and for the brown,
Have I sometimes sought.

Speech.

OFT on the darkened highway
No face of them all do I see
That, out of the tumult and traffic,
Sendeth a message to me;
Yet far in the silent country,
Mayhap no leaf on the tree
But filleth the morning with voices,
And calleth aloud to me.

There are sounds that the ear is deaf to,
Smiles that no eye can see;
Of these hath the heart its language,
Whatever man's speech may be.
Where thou canst catch its accent
Scarce can thy wish foresee,
For than all of a city's clamor
Louder may silence be.

Company.

UNDER his feet, the new cool of the grass;
And overhead, the skies;
While from his heart the long years haste to pass.—
Who could be old or wise
Whom the stream's chatter calleth to so much,
Who sees, with careful eyes,
The oak's pink clusters curl within his touch,
Softly, in baby-wise?

My Room.

GREEN and silver of glimmering birch
Its wind-stirred portière ;
Sun and shadow weave into lace,
As I watch from my moss-upholstered chair
Where hills draw into the open space,
And boughs, ajar to the transient perch
Of gossip sparrows, bar human search.

Stolen haunt of the inner me ;
Freedom-walled from the hours of care,
Built with a better workman's stroke
Into my dreams than can waking dare :
Beam of cedar and floor of oak
Weaker seem than the light birch-tree
That has my soul under lock and key.

My Corridor.

A CORRIDOR my footsteps know
In a palace set where rivers flow,
And my lord the afternoon
Holds his jubilee of June.
Its frescoes are of poplars gray ;
Its soft larch-draperies cling and sway ;
Sounds of laughter and of song
Drift its sunlit length along
From the banquet-halls that look to the west.
It leads the weary unto rest,
And the sober unto mirth,
And all who follow, can it lead from earth.

Riches.

YOUR palace neighbors me, and day by day
I lean and watch you as you come and go;
Your menials line the steps, a hireling row
That scorn me on my unattended way.
Yet have I servants, more than I can tell,
Who ask no silver, and who love me well.

I scarce can dream what wealth your coffers hold,
So low my thatch, so high your palace walls;
But know such silver lines your banquet halls
You reck not of my hoard of autumn's gold.
Methinks of worser metal your estate,
My fellow-farer toward the outer gate.

Song.

SING to me of gold and red.
(*Swallow, list, a-flying.*)
Who has taught you, maple leaf,
Thus to deck and gild a grief,
Thus to sing that summer's dead
And that woods are dying?

Slowly sing the dirge of green.
(*Winds, come hither sighing.*)
Showers of gold the waters know,
Softly falling as the snow;
Crimson paths, tall trunks between,
Autumn's feet are trying.

What Did You Say?

WHAT did you say to me?
I did not understand
If the questioning word
Were the hum of a social bee
Near at hand,
Or a voice at a distance heard;
For man and beast are kin to-day
In the one speech of May.

Seclusion.

WHITE Alpine heights cloud-veil their eyes
From the folk-world below;
Heeding naught less than day's sunrise
That floods with rosy glow
Their uneventful paradise
Where only violets grow.
Would I, too, might shun life's surprise,
And haste, as valleys low;
Would that my soul might, Alpine-wise,
Win lethargies of snow!

Pollen.

BRIGHT in your uniform set with gold,
Your wings unfold,
Messenger bee,
And carry my sweetheart a message from me;
Fly far and low
Till her face you know,
Fairer than other flowers to see.

She will take with her fingers fair
The words of love that I dare,
And hide them in her breast of white.
Yes, she will read aright
All my desire.
Brighter and faster than fire
Carry my love to my love to-night.

The Saxifrage.

DEAREST, thou art to me, the first to dare
The winds and rocks of April hillsides, where
Thou to the sunshine gainest brave access.
A young voice crying in the wilderness,
Thou to prepare the way of spring art sent.
The first lone star in all the firmament
Of earth, that soon shall show its Milky Way
Of thick-set blossoms, wondrous fair in May.

The Poplars.

O WINDS, my winds in the poplars, ye are
lords of my soul to-day.
I have heard your call from the tree-tops, and
watching their branches sway,
My spirit bends and answers, and is lost in you,
even as they.

Your servants don their silver. I hear their voices
cry
As they whiten and waver before you, while the
trail of your robes sweeps by,
And I hear the sound of going, and know that the
Lord is nigh.

Rest.

ONLY the stir of leaves, and the silent sweep of sky;
Clover-tips aware of the breeze that passes by;
Somewhere off in the blue a hidden thrush sings loud;
A long green slope of grass, and above the hill a cloud,—
Summer sights that the schoolboy whistles unheeding past;
Summer sounds that sing me release from the world at last.

The Last Leaf.

I

I WOULD not the heavens were so blue
When the skies of my heart are but gray;
I am mocked by the verdure of May,
For my summer is over and through.
The winds of November I hear.
How sing ye, "'Tis Spring of the Year?"

II

Have I weathered the winter storms
Only to fall in May?
'Twere better have joined the golden forms
Where my dying comrades lay,
Than to see how the spring the world transforms,
And be cast by the winds away.

Slumber Song.

AH, hush, my child; the curfew bell is ringing
The hour when sleep were best.
Across the sky the homing clouds are winging,
And darkness nears the west.
Then sleep, my child, while all the woods are singing
The restless day to rest.

Nirvana.

WAIF of cloud amid the blue,
At its passing, like to you
Would my soul be ; heaven fain,
Azure still and sun-alight,
Resting, garmented in white,
Unaware of joy or pain.

Island in the æther sea,
As your white forgets to be,
Sun-dissolved and zenith-drowned,
So my soul would leave below
Sense and self, and cease, cloud-slow,
Into God's steadfast profound.

A Little Cloud of Night.

ONCE on a time a little cloud of night
Lay dying, and I heard it cry:
"*Oh, the great darkness round me! Mother Sky,*
Bid the white moon but touch me with her light,
Lest thy child waste and die."

Paler and weaker grew the fainting face,
And slower through the night its whispered breath;
Then seemed the sky to brood and night to trace
Upon her shadowed brow new rifts of care,
While as a mother does, she waited death,
Of aught but pain and parting unaware.

Then slowly on the moon its presence drew
And covered with its light the waning cloud,
Till with the touch a sudden soft wind blew,
And through the silence sobbed the sky aloud.
But when the moon had passed the watcher knew
Its rays' white folds had found her child a shroud.

Meridian.

SUN-PASSIONATE am I,
Rose-lit with fires
That glow at morn and eve,
And bid my soul believe
Divine uncertainties and dim desires;
Destined to die
With every nightfall, and to be reborn
With each new morn.

Love-passionate am I,
Dream-hearted still,
Of joyance and of pain,
Of death and living fain,
So my heart reach its vision-haunted hill
Whose heights descry
Man's dwellings, animate with smiles and tears,
With hopes and fears.

God-passionate am I,
Self-urged from earth
Unto a thrice-stilled place,
Wherein a moment's space
Sets the soul free from fear of after-dearth,
Though night draw nigh,
Because the glory of the after-glow
Dwells, sunset-slow.

Restraint.

I HEAR you praise the reds and golds
Across the sunset sky to-day,
That all its beauty wide unfolds
In sudden clamor—yet I say
Mine be the gray,
That passionately holds within its breast
And will not let them free
All the flashing rest,
Such as men hush to see.—
Ah, if for tragedy or pain,
Or if for joy intense your quest,
Look not to the east or west.
I, whose searching is not vain,
Face the north with clouds oppressed;
I, who judge of color, say
Mine be the gray!

Evolution.

OUT of the greater
God granteth the less;
Out of life-tenure,
The mother's caress;

Out of soul's marriage,
The bodily birth;
Out of world-chaos,
The greenness of earth;

Out of the sunshine
The daffodils grew;
Out of love's rapture,
All radiant—you!

Ownership.

SHOULD you offer the sea
With its sunlit blue,
What were that to me?
Let the sea be thine!
Since I hold in fee,
Lovelit and true,
Her eyes that shine,
I would answer you
That all blue is mine.

Requiem.

WHO would know,
Though he were wise,
A bit of soil could go so deep?
Or that beneath the earth one might grope to the skies
So as by sleep?
Yet death can show
How impotent is life
Itself to leave earth or hold others there,
Whate'er its strife;
And how each soul the other's lot would share,
Whether it be to linger or to go.

Requiem.

LEAVE me—alone in the chamber of sleep.
Why fears the body its fostering mould?
Lavish above me the crocuses heap
Nature's unsinned-for, unperished-for gold.
Up from my fingers shall violets creep,
Sweet and life-breathing and gentle to hold.

There in the March-world the cold winds blow shrill;
Better is darkness, and silence is sweet.
Ye that are leaving the brow of the hill,
Think not I envy the tread of your feet;
I, too, have trodden, and now would lie still,—
I with low laughter your weeping would greet.

Here in my dreaming at last I awake;
Who in my rest am not vexed with your care;
I after slumber shall watch the morn break;
Pray, ye that toil still, such sleeping to share.
Welcome your weariness, sent for the sake
Of this else-lost rest, of daisies aware.

Nature Repeats Herself.

HERE and there a new-found scene
Speaks to us with childhood's mien;
Here and there a face we near
Smiles to us of one more dear;
Here and there, when faith's astir,
Earth of Heaven is harbinger.

Resurrection.

TO be wakened by birds that sing
In the sunrise hours of May,
To welcome the vanishing
Of the troubles of yesterday,
And the vigor that noon will bring
Now that slumber has passed away,—
To smile with surprise at awakening
After earth to another day.

Refrains.

(After the Roumanian.)

I.

I HAVE so loved the summer
That it has learned my sorrow;
And now the summer returns
And waits a day with me.

II.

My window looks on the waters,
Where the free winds are blowing;
But the casement will not open,
And there are bars across it.

III.

She smiled on me. Then my heart answered her,
"Smile not again, I pray, but rather weep,
For that would be less sad."

IV.

Knowest thou what the night-winds are saying?
"The years are many and stretch onward,
And yet the years are passing."

Heaven is so Far Away.

(After the Roumanian.)

HEAVEN is so far away,
And my child went in the night-time.
I listen at the open door and say,
His little feet will grow so tired,
How can he find the way?
The wind is high and all the dark is wet;
The storm is loud and he will be afraid;
What if my child should ever homeless stray?
Heaven is so far away!

Day Dreams.

OF the time when he shall be man
Murmurs the child on my knee;
When I sat where the streamlet ran,
Its talk was all of the sea.
The lone pine sings of the woods that sway,
The bird in its cage of the sky,
And of thy love this summer day
Whisper my heart and I.

Spring.

IF mine were choice of rapture, I would be
The heart-beat of a rose in ecstasy;
If mine were slumber, I would deem as best
The moonlit dreaming of a cloud at rest;
If motion, then is motion's crown
The wind-unhastened drifting down
Of petals, whitely setting sail
From apple-boughs, of anchor frail;
If mine were music, it would be
Mid springtime's first-sung symphony;
If color mine, prismatic green,
That holds the rainbow in its sheen;
If mine were knowledge, 'twere to stay
In school with bobolinks all day;
If mine were heaven, 'twere but worth
Spring on such another earth.
What hath taught this all to me?
May and fancy, love and thee!

Metamorphosis.

SLIGHT–FIGURED, leaf-crowned, wandering alone,
A maiden paused beside a rippling stream
To bathe her white feet in the waters' gleam,
Beside whose cool banks violets had grown,
Seeming a thing the woods might rightly own,
So kindred to them did her coming seem.
Of such a mistress might the breezes dream
Made for caressing, swaying there, wind-blown.

Scarce had she stooped, when Pan, a-seeking near
For one more Dryad, some new woodland tree,
Started to see the object of his search.
Her hands set fluttering in her sudden fear.—
And ever since above the waters' glee
Has bent the maiden drooping of the birch.

The Highwayman.

I HAVE lips that woo the roses; I have ears that court the song
Of the apple-blooms and clovers when the soldier-bee is here,
With his noisy talk and bluster such as is to blossoms dear.
I have eyes that on the lilacs linger covertly and long.
Set your briar-dogs upon me, Mother Nature, lest I wrong
These your stately moonlit daughters; lo, their whispering knows me near.
I am highwayman of roses; I shall pluck them, though they fear,
Yet shall I treat them gently, for my love for them is strong.

As the maidens in Greek meadows were by myth and beauty taught,
It were better to be god-sought for a day than loved of man.
Were he prince or were he shepherd, yet his lifetime were as naught
By a Zeus, with all his fire-bolts, or but music-making Pan;
And these blossoms know 'tis better to be loved as mortals can
Than by kindred neighbor suitors in flower-wedlock to be sought.

The Gardener.

I THAT dig in the garden,—busily goes my spade,—
Keep my eyes on my task; hour after hour goes by,
Yet when you pass me, my lady, clad in your rich brocade,
Like some brown, winged seedlings, upward my fancies fly,
Wondering how and wherefore God hath the difference made,—
You, the land's first lady; only a gardener, I.

Bulbs I have set in the earth,—souls are earth-set, too;—
Some will be food for our bodies, formed of the vegetable mould.
This I have carefully planted here for your eyes to view.
One day shall grow the lily, stately and white and cold,
Yet I have tended both,—and God in his tending knew
You, the young fair flower, and I, who am withered and old.

What, do you pause in passing? Somehow I see
your soul.
Now I look up from my garden, and overhead I
see
The sun and the blue as you do, and the same
white clouds that roll;
We are warmed by the self-same sunshine, shaded
alike by the tree.
Ah! but the world is a garden; God hath planted
the whole,
Lily and common earth-bulb; you, my lady, and
me!

PART III.

Echoes from Over-Sea.

Italy, Madonna mine,
If I, too, pause at thy shrine?

Sunset on the Upper Thames; Point Meadow.

THE hour waits sunset as the blind wait sight.
Old Oxford's freehold,—where the centuries lie,—
Low-domed unbrokenly by cloud-scrolled sky,
Is lonely, wind-touched, river-cool to-night.

Cloud-flames, a-sudden, sweep the air with light,
And deepen as they rush, unroaring, by.
My heart, aghast at color, verily
Watches, fast beating, how the flames grow bright.

A rising flock of white doves takes the glow,
Self-offered on the dead day's funeral pyres;
Broad, level light, rose-tinged, winds river-slow
About the willows; and the distant spires
Of Oxford answer to the west, where low
Burn the red embers that have set the fires.

A Burne-Jones' Woman.

WHETHER thou art Madonna, stayed by an angel guest,
Or a maiden dreaming idly, 'mid summer flowers astray,
One is the face and figure, whether joy or sadness may
Fall on the work of the painter, that his mood be made manifest.
In thine eyes he has written clearly the creed of an unchanged quest,
To seek for the best alone, and for the rest to pray
That the world find on his canvas the grace of an earlier day,
And that thou, unknown and younger, be sister yet to the best.

So hast thou been; the maiden hath caught Madonna's grace,
And the mother of Christ hath drawn for her woman's eyes more near.
So is it thou, though silent, hast won thyself a place
In the heart of whom aforetime have held but those days dear,
When art was young in Florence, and deemed but strange the face
Of this far younger land and later year.

From the Train.

A HANDFUL of steep red roofs that the traveler on the train
Sees flash through the smoke to a town, and back into smoke again;
Clustered gables that rise, set close 'neath a spire on the plain.

A handful of simple souls that re-wake each dawn of day
To the reaping of fields that wave, to the care of the child at play,
And to sup when the dusk is nigh, and the Angelus rings to pray.

Little ye know of life, whose ways are of times far past.
Idly revolves your glass, while the sands of our cities run fast;
Yet do ye work, and love, and sin, and die at the last.

Already half forgot, ere the shriek of the train is still,
Yet, perchance in the day of God, men shall know ye have kept His will,
And the town of the plain shall be as a city set on a hill.

On the Rigi—Question.

WHAT thinks your silence of me, as your glimpse of life, the train,
Climbs slowly, noisily past you, and you stand a-gaze at me?
Folk of the snows, mountain-dwellers, am I, then, so strange to see?
'Tis you are as dreams and shadows and a fancy in my brain,
And I doubt not you will vanish ere the low sun sets again;
Brown roofs gathered together, washed by a cloudy sea,
Snows and the mountain torrent, and the sighing green of the tree:
Shall I seek you, all-bewildered, and find for the hills a plain?
Your speech is wordless to me, and your life is strange no less,
Yet have you spoken to me clearer than language can;
And though I haste, for there beckon scenes that you cannot guess,
In a city too far away for your highest snows to discern,
Yet oft from its tumult, I know, shall my heart to your distance turn,
For somewhat out of your silence hath uttered the language of man.

On the Rigi—Answer.

YE who would visit my mountains, as your eyes have seen, fain would I see.
Ye who have trod city pavements, I, too, would hear bustle of feet.
To me, bred in snows and in silence, the clamor of voices is sweet,
Yet must I die on my hillside; what kens the city of me?

I, who drive the goats early to pasture, and sleep ere the twilight is near,
With the rush of the stream for a curfew, its call in my ears as I rise,
Is it strange, after years of its uproar, men's voices I long for and prize,
With the love in them, hate in them, mayhap; yet man's none the less, therefore dear?

Your speech is wordless to me, and your life is strange no less,
Yet have you spoken to me clearer than language can;
And though you haste, for there beckon scenes that I cannot guess,
In the cities too far away for my highest snows to discern,
Yet to your world beyond me my dreaming shall often turn,
For somewhat out of your passing hath uttered the language of man.

A Street of Sorrento.

I HAVE halted impetuous feet
For a traveler's curious stay;
I have turned, nothing sated, away
From the whitely-paved, casement-lined street,
Where the passing of flower-girls is sweet,
And the shadows and sun are at play,
Pausing only as wanderers may,
For the mark on the dial is fleet.

From afar I have thought oftenwhiles
Of these byways where footsteps are slow;
Of the sun and the shadows that go
Over scenes that the painter beguiles;
Of the leisure that sunnily smiles,
And that trade with its haste cannot know.

On the Amalfi Road.

LONG curves of foam-bound blue that shameth blue,
Where rocks look out upon a west of sea;
Above there winds, and else were nature free;
Trade's chain of white road that enslaves here, too.
Down by the sands, half hid from passer's view,
Rough fisher-folk do battle with the sea,
And win therefrom what seemeth scarce to be
Enough to keep men brave or women true.

Above there go, you who seek rest and peace,
To leave the world's noise for a while behind;
To you these are a picture of the mind,
Not men, indeed, who crave like you, release
From toil and care, yet dream not such to find,
Nor heed your passing, while your echoes cease.

The Landslide at Amalfi.

(December, 1899.)

SO many years the monks their cloister paced
Above the sea that white Amalfi faced,
And judged them owners of the sea and air,
Not failing to thank Heaven for their due share.
Meanwhile the sea in jealous hate grimaced,
And gnashed white teeth in hatred of their prayer.
Meanwhile the years past, and all Nature graced
Far-famed Amalfi, fairest of the fair.

There came a day when the sea lay and smiled,
As a dark-cowled procession sadly filed
From the old walls, sent forth by law's mandate,
Because past power, self-deemed inviolate,
Was forfeit, and the over-proud, exiled;
Twice-heavy is misfortune to the great.
Yet scarce by this was the sea reconciled,
But well the years had taught it how to wait.

Once in the centuries has the sea its day,
And so, long past, it wrecked Amalfi's sway;
And so again—the echoes scarce are still—
It leaped up, pitiless, to wreak its will
Upon its foes' old home, its long-sought prey,—
Grotto and cloister and fair, vine-decked hill,—
That went, wave-charmed, a rock-torn, shuddering way:
So seas their vows of vengeance can fulfill.

In Florence.

MY dreams take vestiture of gates and tower
To-day, at last, 'neath Brunelleschi's dome,
Madonna'd by St. Mary of the Flower,
Exile is over, and my heart come home.
Canvas and marble dim not as elsewhere,
And master spirits brood o'er bridge and square.

A city many-memoried, wherein of old
In angeled cell a monk prayed over long
An old, rare volume, Arno-bound in gold,
With Dante's love the frontispiece to song;
The world's best folio, warm yet from the hand
Of Andrea and Angelo and Alessandr'.

St. John the Baptist.

WHO paints Madonnas painteth women still:
Let him beware lest who his canvas scan
See there a woman only; one who can
Love and be loved—no more—at human will.

Who painteth Christ can scarce do else than ill,
Or show, despite the greatness of his plan,
By some strange failure, rather less than man,
Though in all else unbaffled were his skill.

Who paints St. John hath ever kept him pure,
For careless or for steadfast eyes to see,—
Mayhap just God enough in him made sure
That art should answer to his beckoning hand;
Just man enough that man might understand
What the forerunner of a Christ could be!

Fra Angelico.

CLUSTERING haloed figures, all intent
On sounds wherein they may His name adore
In all the curious ways of music-lore
On many a mediæval instrument.
Such wealth of hues was ne'er so richly blent,
Nor e'er by artist half conceived before,
As these of golden Arno's sunset shore,
And Florentine old noontides eloquent.

From a past faith, where aught but gloom was sin,
Come these, ashine, to scatter darkness quite
Across the future's doubt lest right be right;
Flash gold and crimson, like the sun let in
Through high choir windows on cathedral night,—
Like Indian summers after frosts begin.

Old and New.

TO fight and conquer sin, Apostle-wise;
To die a death of shame, yet hold faith fast,
Nor fear the pain that freed them centuries past,—
These were the martyrs, winners of the prize.
For them an unthought fame did art devise:
Their heads gold-circled; stationed on each hand
About Madonna and the Son they stand,
Bending in awe, and in a saint's surprise.

We pause amazed before such deeds to-day,
Nor deem that such as they be with us yet,
And say faith died while still the paints were wet
Upon the canvas, timeworn now and gray.
Meanwhile God sends upon a silent way
Unhaloed saints, whom after years forget.

The Arno.

AS a monk within his cell
Waits till chimes, at sunset pealing,
Ring his freedom, find him kneeling
Rapt before the Raphael;
There, a sunset sentinel,
Where the western sunbeams stealing,
All the great stained glass revealing,
Have not failed to love him well,—

So have I the Arno waited,
Leave to face my shrine, the West,
While its glory, crimson-sated,
Burns a gleam upon my breast,
Kneeling as a monk, breath-bated,
At the sunset's glow—God's best.

An Andrea del Sarto Madonna.

GRANT me the old life that I knew before.
I would no more, alas! Madonna be,
Could I but know the child upon my knee
Had such as other children have in store;
Young Hebrew manhood, skilled in priestly lore,
Or peaceful age, though of less proud degree;
Then would I fear no future's mystery,
And mothers wait Messiah as of yore.

I look adown the widening of the years,
And by their blinding light mine eyes are dim,
The while my heart starts from the sight afraid.
All the world's needs, and the world's unshed tears
I fain would shut from pitying ken of Him
Who has himself its Lord and captive made.

Dante.

WHAT is a sonnet? Twice the magic seven,
Quick-throbbing heart-beats that to Dante's ear
Cried, "Hush, the world stops! Beatrice is near
To guide you up to fame and love and Heaven!"
What is a sonnet? 'Tis the dial frame
Whereon the sun of love the shade has thrown
Of a white profile, laurel-wreathed, and shown
On love's long day, its high-noon, Dante's name.

Who now to fashion sonnets, would be bold?
And who that whisper loving, each to each,
Can dream a purer passion could befall
Than Dante's dream, to the world's waking told,
And since love still finds in them sweetest speech,
They do but mirror Dante, after all.

Two Painters.

TWO painters once, when Italy was young,
Lived, one in palace walls, his praises sung
By rich and great about him. Other quite
Was the poor monk's celled life, and yet one night,
Worn with self-torture, faint from lack of food,
'Tis said Christ smiled on him from the cell's rood.

To these at rest the self-same night, a dream
Flashed on the dark of sleep its lightning gleam.
"Go show the Father to mankind. Awake!"

The one arose, scarce waiting food to take.
"'Twill be the world's best picture,—mine the praise;—
I only have been chosen to reveal God's face!"

Long days he toiled, till his high palace wall
Bore Moses, Zeus, perhaps—scarce God at all;
But eager crowds, that came with servile speed,
Bidden from feasting, cried, "'Tis God indeed!
By the great master—lo, his name is there!"

The other bent in prayer.
"Let not Thy servant dare this task;
To paint the angel at Thy feet I ask."

The while he toiled, years past.
They buried him, 'tis said, at last,
When the great picture's glow was scarcely dry,
And the poor wept as the slow monks wound by,
Bearing him graveward. But the world forgot
His name, and later centuries know it not.

Thou who hast shown God's angel hast shown
God's self supreme,
And hast alone divined the message of the dream.
What couldst thou more? Thou hast taught men
to pray.
They who before thy angel pause to-day
Are thousands, who through the St. Michael's eyes
See God themselves. Thine be the better prize.

The Artist in Italy.

I AM the well-born artist; models, ye knock at my door.
Arno-reflected bridges, twilights of Italy,
Indoor sunsets aflame on a gold-walled sacristy,
White-robed cloistered dwellers, ye hide to be seen the more,—
Ye whose shadows pass across my shield,
Unware or willing, to my art revealed.

As I watch, like the mist of a breath on my glass that is sunlit and clear,
There widens before me a vision, a nearing sheaf of light;
Beatrice my heart calls is near,—Beatrice has burst on my sight.
Whispers have deafening echoes; distance is not, she is here:
Then, as I gaze, she is gone; vanished the while she smiled,
And instead a saint is kneeling before Madonna's child.

My pictured saint with the aureole,
In thy passion of prayer the ages through
Thou hast never suffered as mortals do,
Nor ever known life in its whole,—
Love nor fear, nor aught but exaltation,
Yet hast thou shaped the century of a nation.

Now even God have I ventured; Thou, the greatest,
art to me
Another such, though the best, as is all the world
around,
Thou art mine to paint no less though Thou art
a Saviour crowned,—
And the dusk of the nave shall glimmer with what
I have drawn of Thee,
Thou, my beautiful Christ, hanging in patience and
pain,
Hearer of all men's prayers,—Thou shepherd, the
lamb that was slain.

Yet where so many fail, shall I endure?
Doubt asks me if my hope be not unwise;
I hear a whisper from the answering skies,
"Enough it is if Truth be sure.
Question not, but keep steady the glass;
Paint what you see—they are bidden to pass."

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